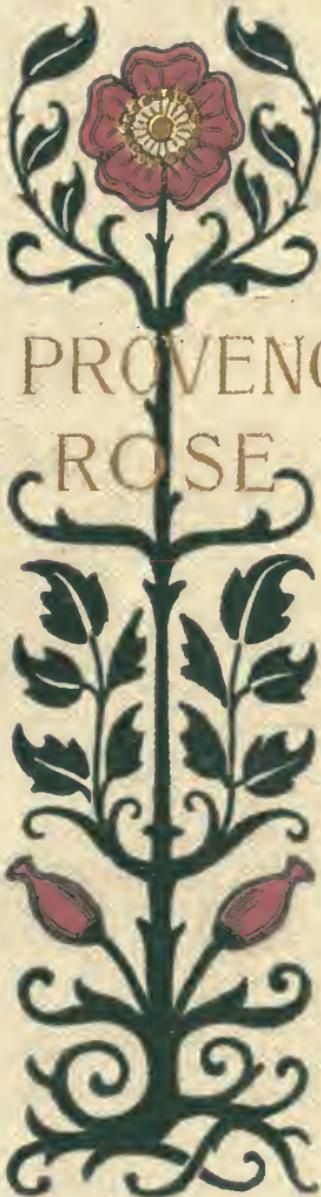
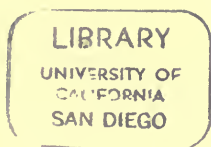


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A PROVENCE
ROSE

COSY CORNER SERIES



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A PROVENCE ROSE.

Works of
Louisa de la Ramé
(“ Ouida ”)



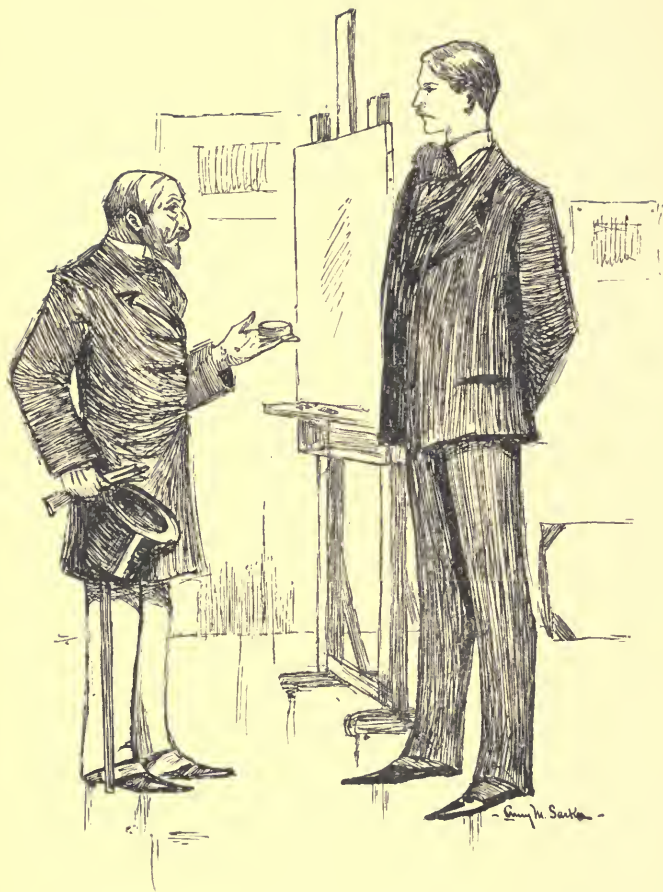
A Dog of Flanders
The Nürnberg Stove
A Provence Rose
Two Little Wooden Shoes



L. C. PAGE AND COMPANY

(Incorporated)

212 Summer St., Boston, Mass.



"Cosy Corner Series"

A PROVENCE ROSE

BY

LOUISA DE LA RAMÉ

("OUIDA")

ILLUSTRATED



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BOSTON

L. C. PAGE AND COMPANY

(INCORPORATED)

1900

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A PROVENCE ROSE.

PART FIRST.

I WAS a Provence rose.

A little slender rose, with leaves of shining green and blossoms of purest white,—a little fragile thing, but fair, they said, growing in the casement in a chamber in a street.

I remember my birth-country well. A great wild garden, where roses grew together by millions and tens of millions, all tossing our bright heads in the light of a southern sun on the edge of an old, old city—old as Rome—whose ruins were clothed with the wild fig-tree and the scarlet blossom of the climbing creepers growing tall and free in our glad air of France.

I remember how the ruined aqueduct went like a dark shadow straight across the plains; how the green and golden lizards crept in and out and about amongst the grasses; how the cicala sang her song in the moist, sultry eves;

how the women from the wells came trooping by, stately as monarchs, with their water-jars upon their heads; how the hot hush of the burning noons would fall, and all things droop and sleep except ourselves; how swift amongst us would dart the little blue-winged birds, and hide their heads in our white breasts and drink from our hearts the dew, and then hover above us in their gratitude, with sweet, faint music of their wings, till sunset came.

I remember — But what is the use? I am only a rose; a thing born for a day, to bloom and be gathered, and die. So you say: you must know. God gave you all created things for your pleasure and use. So you say.

There my birth was; there I lived — in the wide south, with its strong, quivering light, its radiant skies, its purple plains, its fruits of gourd and vine. I was young; I was happy; I lived: it was enough.

One day a rough hand tore me from my parent stem and took me, bleeding and drooping, from my birthplace, with a thousand other captives of my kind. They bound a score of us up together, and made us a cruel substitute for our cool, glad garden-home with poor leaves, all wet from their own tears, and mosses

torn as we were from their birth-nests under the great cedars that rose against the radiant native skies.

Then we were shut in darkness for I know not how long a space; and when we saw the light of day again we were lying with our dear dead friends, the leaves, with many flowers of various kinds, and foliage and ferns and shrubs and creeping plants, in a place quite strange to us,—a place filled with other roses and with all things that bloom and bear in the rich days of midsummer,—a place which I heard them call the market of the Madeleine. And when I heard that name I knew that I was in Paris.

For many a time, when the dread hand of the reaper had descended upon us, and we had beheld our fairest and most fragrant relatives borne away from us to death, a shiver that was not of the wind had run through all our boughs and blossoms, and all the roses had murmured in sadness and in terror, “Better the worm or the drought, the blight or the fly, the whirlwind that scatters us as chaff, or the waterspout that levels our proudest with the earth—better any of these than the long-lingering death by famine and faintness and thirst that awaits every flower which goes to the Madeleine.”

It was an honor, no doubt, to be so chosen. A rose was the purest, the sweetest, the haughtiest of all her sisterhood ere she went thither. But, though honor is well no doubt, yet it surely is better to blow free in the breeze and to live one's life out, and to be, if forgotten by glory, yet also forgotten by pain. Nay, yet: I have known a rose, even a rose who had but one little short life of a summer day to live through and to lose, perish glad and triumphant in its prime because it died on a woman's breast and of a woman's kiss. You see there are roses as weak as men are.

I awoke, I say, from my misery and my long night of travel, with my kindred beside me in exile, on a flower-stall of the Madeleine.

It was noon—the pretty place was full of people: it was June, and the day was brilliant. A woman of Picardy sat with us on the board before her,—a woman with blue eyes and earrings of silver, who bound us together in fifties and hundreds into those sad gatherings of our pale ghosts which in your human language you have called “bouquets.” The loveliest and greatest amongst us suffered decapitation, as your Marie Stuarts and Marie Antoinettes did, and died at once to have their beautiful, bright

heads impaled—a thing of death, a mere mockery of a flower—on slender spears of wire. I, a little white and fragile thing, and very young, was in no way eminent enough amongst my kind to find that martyrdom which as surely awaits the loveliest of our roses as it awaits the highest fame of your humanity.

I was bound up amongst a score of others with ropes of gardener's bass to chain me amidst my fellow-prisoners, and handed over by my jailer with the silver ear-rings to a youth who paid for us with a piece of gold—whether of great or little value I know not now. None of my own roses were with me: all were strangers. You never think, of course, that a little rose can care for its birthplace or its kindred; but you err.

O fool! Shall we not care for one another?—we who have so divine a life in common, who together sleep beneath the stars, and together sport in the summer wind, and together listen to the daybreak singing of the birds, whilst the world is dark and deaf in slumber—we who know that we are all of heaven that God, when He called away His angels, bade them leave on the sin-stained, weary, sickly earth to now and then make man remember Him!

You err. We love one another well; and if we may not live in union, we crave at least in union to droop and die. It is seldom that we have this boon. Wild flowers can live and die together; so can the poor amongst you: but we of the cultivated garden needs must part and die alone.

All the captives with me were strangers: haughty, scentless pelargoniums; gardenias, arrogant even in their woe; a knot of little, humble forget-me-nots, ashamed in the grand company of patrician prisoners; a stephanalis, virginal and pure, whose dying breath was peace and sweetness; and many sprays of myrtle born in Rome, whose classic leaves wailed Tasso's lamentation as they went.

I must have been more loosely fettered than the rest were, for in the rough, swift motion of the youth who bore us my bonds gave way and I fell through the silver transparency of our prison-house, and dropped stunned upon the stone pavement of a street.

There I lay long, half senseless, praying, so far as I had consciousness, that some pitying wind would rise and waft me on his wings away to some shadow, some rest, some fresh, cool place of silence.

I was tortured with thirst; I was choked with dust; I was parched with heat.

The sky was as brass, the stones as red-hot metal; the sun scorched like flame on the glare of the staring walls; the heavy feet of the hurrying crowd tramped past me black and ponderous; with every step I thought my death would come under the crushing weight of those clanging heels.

It was five seconds, five hours—which I know not. The torture was too horrible to be measured by time. I must have been already dead, or at the very gasp of death, when a cool, soft touch was laid on me; I was gently lifted, raised to tender lips, and fanned with a gentle, cooling breath,—breath from the lips that had kissed me.

A young girl had found and rescued me,—



a girl of the people, poor enough to deem a trampled flower a treasure-trove.

She carried me very gently, carefully veiling me from sun and dust as we went; and when I recovered perception I was floating in a porcelain bath on the surface of cool, fresh water, from which I drank eagerly as soon as my sickly sense of faintness passed away.

My bath stood on the lattice-sill of a small chamber; it was, I knew afterward, but a white pan of common earthenware, such as you buy for two sous and put in your birdcages. But no bath of ivory and pearl and silver was ever more refreshing to imperial or patrician limbs than was that little clean and snowy^{*} pattypan to me.

Under its reviving influences I became able to lift my head and raise my leaves and spread myself to the sunlight, and look round me. The chamber was in the roof, high above the traffic of the passage-way beneath; it was very poor, very simple, furnished with few and homely things. True, to all our nation of flowers it matters little, when we are borne into captivity, whether the prison-house which receives us be palace or garret. Not to us can it signify whether we perish in Sèvres vase of royal blue, or in

kitchen pipkin of brown ware. Your lordliest halls can seem but dark, pent, noisome dungeons to creatures born to live on the wide plain, by the sunlit meadow, in the hedgerow, or the forest, or the green, leafy garden-way ; tossing always in the joyous winds, and looking always upward to the open sky.

But it is of little use to dwell on this. You think that flowers, like animals, were only created to be used and abused by you, and that we, like your horse and dog, should be grateful when you honor us by slaughter or starvation at your hands. To be brief, this room was very humble, a mere attic, with one smaller still opening from it ; but I scarcely thought of its size or aspect. I looked at nothing but the woman who had saved me. She was quite young ; not very beautiful, perhaps, except for wonderful soft azure eyes, and a mouth smiling and glad, with lovely curves to the lips, and hair dark as a raven's wing, which was braided and bound close to her head. She was clad very poorly, yet with an exquisite neatness and even grace ; for she was of the people no doubt, but of the people of France. Her voice was very melodious ; she had a silver cross on her bosom ; and, though her face was pale, it had health.

She was my friend, I felt sure. Yes, even when she held me and pierced me with steel and murmured over me, "They say roses are so hard to rear so, and you are such a little thing; but do grow to a tree and live with me. Surely, you can if you try."

She had wounded me sharply and thrust me into a tomb of baked red clay filled with black and heavy mould. But I knew that I was pierced to the heart that I might—though only a little offshoot gathered to die in a day—strike root of my own and be strong, and carry a crown of fresh blossoms. For she but dealt with me as your world deals with you, when your heart aches and your brain burns, and Fate stabs you, and says in your ear, "O fool! to be great you must suffer." You to your fate are thankless, being human; but I, a rose, was not.

I tried to feel not utterly wretched in that little, dull clay cell; I tried to forget my sweet, glad southern birthplace, and not to sicken and swoon in the noxious gases of the city air. I did my best not to shudder in the vapor of the stove, and not to grow pale in the clammy heats of the street, and not to die of useless lamentation for all that I had lost—for the noble tawny

sunsets, and the sapphire blue skies, and the winds all fragrant with the almond-tree flowers, and the sunlight in which the yellow orioles flashed like gold.

I did my best to be content and show my gratitude all through a parching autumn and a hateful winter; and with the spring a wandering wind came and wooed me with low, amorous whispers—came from the south, he said; and I learned that even in exile in an attic window love may find us out and make for us a country and a home.

So I lived and grew and was happy there against the small, dim garret panes, and my lover from the south came, still faithful, year by year; and all the voices round me said that I was fair—pale indeed, and fragile of strength, as a creature torn from its own land and all its friends must be, but contented and glad, and grateful to the God who made me, because I had not lived in vain, but often saw sad eyes, half blinded with toil and tears, smile at me when they had no other cause for smiles.

“It is bitter to be mewed in a city,” said once to me an old, old vine who had been thrust into the stones below and had climbed the house wall, Heaven knew how, and had lived

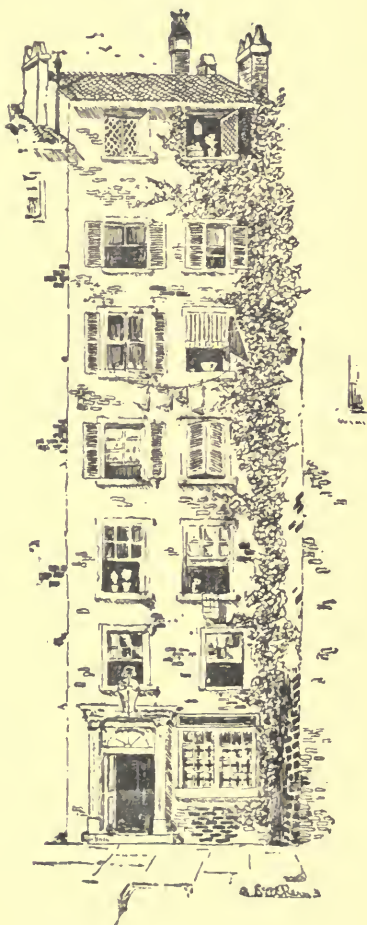
for half a century jammed between buildings, catching a gleam of sunshine on his dusty leaves once perhaps in a whole summer. "It is bitter for us. I would rather have had the axe at my root and been burned. But perhaps without us the poorest of people would never remember the look of the fields. When they see a green leaf they laugh a little, and then weep — some of them. We, the trees and the flowers, live in the cities as those souls amongst them whom they call poets live in the world, — exiled from heaven that by them the world may now and then bethink itself of God."

And I believe that the vine spoke truly. Surely, he who plants a green tree in a city way plants a thought of God in many a human heart arid with the dust of travail and clogged with the greeds of gold. So, with my lover the wind and my neighbor the vine, I was content and patient, and gave many hours of pleasure to many hard lives, and brought forth many a blossom 'of sweetness in that little nook under the roof.

Had my brothers and sisters done better, I wonder, living in gilded balconies or dying in jewelled hands?

I cannot say : I can only tell of myself.

The attic in which I found it my fate to dwell was very high in the air, set in one of the peaked roofs of the quarter of the Luxembourg, in a very narrow street, populous, and full of noise, in which people of all classes, except the rich, were to be found—in a medley of artists, students, fruit-sellers, workers in bronze and ivory, seamstresses, obscure actresses, and all the creators, male and female, of the thousand and one airy arts of elegant nothingness which a world of pleasure demands as imperatively as a world of labor demands its bread.



It would have been a street horrible and hideous in any city save Rome or Paris: in Rome it would have been saved by color and antiquity; in Paris it was saved by color and grace. Just a flash of a bright drapery, just a gleam of a gay hue, just some tender pink head of a hydrangea, just some quaint curl of some gilded woodwork, just the green glimmer of my friend the vine, just the snowy sparkle of his neighbor the waterspout,—just these, so little and yet so much, made the crooked passage a bearable home, and gave it a kinship with the glimpse of the blue sky above its pent roofs.

O wise and true wisdom! to redeem poverty with the charms of outline and of color, with the green bough and the song of running water, and the artistic harmony which is as possible to the rough-hewn pine-wood as in the polished ebony. “It is of no *use*!” you cry. O fools! Which gives you perfume—we, the roses, whose rich hues and matchless grace no human artist can imitate, or the rose-trémière, which mocks us, standing stiff and gaudy and scentless and erect? Grace and pure color and cleanliness are the divinities that redeem the foulness and the ignorance and the slavery of your

crushed, coarse lives when you have sight enough to see that they are divine.

In my little attic, in whose window I have passed my life, they were known gods and honored; so that, despite the stovepipe, and the poverty, and the little ill-smelling candle, and the close staircase without, with the rancid oil in its lamps and its fetid faint odors, and the refuse, and the gutters, and the gas in the street below, it was possible for me, though a rose of Provence and a rose of the open air freeborn, to draw my breath in it and to bear my blossoms, and to smile when my lover the wind roused me from sleep with each spring, and said in my ear, "Arise! for a new year is come." Now, to greet a new year with a smile, and not a sigh, one must be tranquil, at least, if not happy.

Well, I and the lattice, and a few homely plants of saxafrage and musk and balsam who bloomed there with me, and a canary who hung in a cage amongst us, and a rustic creeper who clung to a few strands of strained string and climbed to the roof and there talked all day to the pigeons—we all belonged to the girl with the candid, sweet eyes, and by name she was called Lili Kerrouel, and for her bread she

gilded and colored those little cheap boxes for sweetmeats that they sell in the wooden booths at the fairs on the boulevards, while the *mirli-tons* whirl in their giddy go-rounds and the merry horns of the charlatans challenge the populace. She was a girl of the people: she could read, but I doubt if she could write. She had been born of peasant parents in a Breton hamlet, and they had come to Paris to seek work, and had found it for a while and prospered, and then had fallen sick and lost it, and struggled for a while, and then died, running the common course of so many lives amongst you. They had left Lili alone at sixteen, or rather worse than alone—with an old grandam, deaf and quite blind, who could do nothing for her own support, but sat all day in a wicker chair by the lattice or the stove, according as the season was hot or cold, and mumbled a little inarticulately over her worn wooden beads.

Her employers allowed Lili to bring these boxes to decorate at home, and she painted at them almost from dawn to night. She swept, she washed, she stewed, she fried, she dusted; she did all the housework of her two little rooms; she tended the old woman in all ways;

and she did all these things with such cleanliness and deftness that the attics were wholesome as a palace ; and though her pay was very small, she yet found means and time to have her linen spotless and make her pots and pans shine like silver and gold, and to give a grace to all the place, with the song of a happy bird and the fragrance of flowers that blossomed their best and their sweetest for her sake, when they would fain have withered to the root and died in their vain longing for the pure breath of the fields and the cool of a green woodland world.

It was a little, simple, hard life, no doubt, — a life one would have said scarce worth all the trouble it took to get bread enough to keep it going, — a hard life, coloring always the same eternal little prints all day long, no matter how sweet the summer day might be, or how hot the tired eyes.

A hard life, with all the wondrous, glorious, wasteful, splendid life of the beautiful city around it in so terrible a contrast ; with the roll of the carriages day and night on the stones beneath, and the pattering of the innumerable feet below, all hurrying to some pleasure, and every moment some burst of music or some chime of bells or some ripple of laughter on

the air. A hard life, sitting one's self in a little dusky garret in the roof, and straining one's sight for two sous an hour, and listening to an old woman's childish mutterings and reproaches, and having always to shake the head in refusal of the neighbors' invitations to a day in the woods or a sail on the river. A hard life, no doubt, when one is young and a woman, and has soft, shining eyes and a red, curling mouth.

And yet Lili was content.

Content, because she was a French girl; because she had always been poor, and thought two sous an hour riches; because she loved the helpless old creature whose senses had all died while her body lived on; because she was an artist at heart, and saw beautiful things round her even when she scoured her brasses and washed down her bare floor.

Content, because with it all she managed to gather a certain "sweetness and light" into her youth of toil; and when she could give herself a few hours' holiday, and could go beyond the barriers, and roam a little in the wooded places, and come home with a knot of primroses or a plume of lilac in her hands, she was glad and grateful as though she had been given gold and gems.

Ah! In the lives of you who have wealth and leisure we, the flowers, are but one thing among many: we have a thousand rivals in your porcelains, your jewels, your luxuries, your intaglios, your mosaics, all your treasures of art, all your baubles of fancy. But in the lives of the poor we are alone: we are all the art, all the treasure, all the grace, all the beauty of outline, all the purity of hue, that they possess: often we are all their innocence and all their religion too.

Why do you not set yourselves to make us more abundant in those joyless homes, in those sunless windows?

Now this street of hers was very narrow: it was full of old houses, that nodded their heads close together as they talked, like your old crones over their fireside gossip.

I could, from my place in the window, see right into the opposite garret window. It had nothing of my nation in it, save a poor colorless stone-wort, who got a dismal living in the gutter of the roof, yet who too, in his humble way, did good and had his friends, and paid the sun and the dew for calling him into being. For on that rainpipe the little dusty, thirsty sparrows would rest and bathe and plume them-

selves, and bury their beaks in the pale stone-crop, and twitter with one another joyfully, and make believe that they were in some green and amber meadow in the country in the cowslip time.

I did not care much for the stone-crop or the sparrows; but in the third summer of my captivity there with Lili the garret casement opposite stood always open, as ours did, and I could watch its tenant night and day as I chose.

He had an interest for me.

He was handsome, and about thirty years old; with a sad and noble face, and dark eyes full of dreams, and cheeks terribly hollow, and clothes terribly threadbare.

He thought no eyes were on him when my lattice looked dark, for his garret, like ours, was so high that no glance from the street ever went to it. Indeed, when does a crowd ever pause to look at a garret, unless by chance a man have hanged himself out of its window? That in thousands of garrets men may be dying by inches for lack of bread, lack of hope, lack of justice, is not enough to draw any eyes upward to them from the pavement.

He thought himself unseen, and I watched him many a long hour of the summer night

when I sighed at my square open pane in the hot, sulphurous mists of the street, and tried to see the stars and could not. For, between me and the one small breadth of sky which alone the innumerable roofs left visible, a vintner had hung out a huge gilded imperial crown as a sign on his roof-tree; and the crown, with its sham gold turning black in the shadow, hung between me and the planets.

I knew that there must be many human souls in a like plight with myself, with the light of heaven blocked from them by a gilded tyranny; and yet I sighed and sighed and sighed, thinking of the white, pure stars of Provence throbbing in her violet skies.

A rose is hardly wiser than a poet, you see; neither rose nor poet will be comforted, and be content to dwell in darkness because a crown of tinsel swings on high.

Well, not seeing the stars as I strove to do, I took refuge in sorrow for my neighbor. It is well for your poet when he turns to a like resource. Too often I hear he takes, instead, to the wine-cellar which yawns under the crown that he curses.

My neighbor, I soon saw, was poorer even than we were. He was a painter, and he painted

beautiful things. But his canvases and the necessities of his art were nearly all that his empty



attic had in it; and when, after working many hours with a wretched glimmer of oil, he would

come to his lattice and lean out, and try, as I had tried, to see the stars, and fail, as I had failed, I saw that he was haggard, pallid, and weary unto death with two dire diseases, — hunger and ambition.

He could not see the stars because of the crown, but in time, in those long midsummer nights, he came to see a little glowworm amongst my blossoms, which in a manner, perhaps, did nearly as well.

He came to notice Lili at her work. Often she had to sit up half the night to get enough coloring done to make up the due amount of labor; and she sat at her little deal table, with her little feeble lamp, with her beautiful hair coiled up in a great knot and her pretty head drooping so wearily — as we do in the long days of drought — but never once looking off, nor giving way to rebellion or fatigue, though from the whole city without there came one ceaseless sound, like the sound of an endless sea; which truly it was — the sea of pleasure.

Not for want of coaxings, not for want of tempters, various and subtle, and dangers often and perilously sweet, did Lili sit there in her solitude earning two sous an hour with straining sight and aching nerves that the old

paralytic creature within might have bed and board without alms. Lili had been sore beset in a thousand ways, for she was very fair to see; but she was proud and she was innocent, and she kept her courage and her honor; yea, though you smile — though she dwelt under an attic roof, and that roof a roof of Paris.

My neighbor, in the old gabled window over the way, leaning above his stone-wort, saw her one night thus at work by her lamp, with the silver ear-rings, that were her sole heirloom and her sole wealth, drooped against the soft hues and curves of her graceful throat.

And when he had looked once, he looked every night, and found her there; and I, who could see straight into his chamber, saw that he went and made a picture of it all — of me, and the bird in the cage, and the little old dusky lamp, and Lili with her silver ear-rings and her pretty, drooping head.

Every day he worked at the picture, and every night he put his light out and came and sat in the dark square of his lattice, and gazed across the street through my leaves and my blossoms at my mistress. Lili knew nothing of this watch which he kept on her; she had put up a little blind of white network, and she

fancied that it kept out every eye when it was up ; and often she took even that away, because she had not the heart to deprive me of the few faint breezes which the sultry weather gave us.

She never saw him in his dark hole in the old gable there, and I never betrayed him—not I. Roses have been the flowers of silence ever since the world began. Are we not the flowers of love?

“Who is he?” I asked of my gossip the vine. The vine had lived fifty years in the street, and knew the stories and sorrows of all the human bees in the hive.

“He is called René Claude,” said the vine. “He is a man of genius. He is very poor.”

“You use synonyms,” murmured the old balsam, who heard.

“He is an artist,” the vine continued. “He is young. He comes from the south. His people are guides in the Pyrenees. He is a dreamer of dreams. He has taught himself many things. He has eloquence too. There is a little club at the back of the house which I climb over. I throw a tendril or two in at the crevices and listen. The shutters are closed. It is forbidden by law for men to meet so. There René speaks by the hour,

superbly. Such a rush of words, such a glance, such a voice, like the roll of musketry in anger, like the sigh of music in sadness! Though I am old, it makes the little sap there is left in me thrill and grow warm. He paints beautiful things too; so the two swallows say who build under his eaves; but I suppose it is not of much use: no one believes in him, and he almost starves. He is young yet, and feels the strength in him, and still strives to do great things for the world that does not care a jot whether he lives or dies. He will go on so a little longer. Then he will end like me. I used to try and bring forth the best grapes I could, though they had shut me away from any sun to ripen them and any dews to cleanse the dust from them. But no one cared. No one gave me a drop of water to still my thirst, nor pushed away a brick to give me a ray more of light. So I ceased to try and produce for their good; and I only took just so much trouble as would keep life in me myself. It will be the same with this man."

I, being young and a rose, the flower loved of the poets, thought the vine was a cynic, as many of you human creatures grow to be in the years of your age when the leaves of your life

fall sere. I watched René long and often. He was handsome, he suffered much; and when the night was far spent he would come to his hole in the gable and gaze with tender, dreaming eyes past my pale foliage to the face of Lili. I grew to care for him, and I disbelieved the prophecy of the vine; and I promised myself that one summer or another, near or far, the swallows, when they came from the tawny African world to build in the eaves of the city, would find their old friend flown and living no more in a garret, but in some art-palace where men knew his fame.

So I dreamed — I, a little white rose, exiled in the passage of a city, seeing the pale moonlight reflected on the gray walls and the dark windows, and trying to cheat myself by a thousand fancies into the faith that I once more blossomed in the old, sweet, leafy garden-ways in Provence.

One night — the hottest night of the year — Lili came to my side by the open lattice. It was very late; her work was done for the night. She stood a moment, with her lips rested softly on me, looking down on the pavement that glistened like silver in the sleeping rays of the moon.



For the first time she saw the painter René watching her from his niche in the gable, with eyes that glowed and yet were dim.

I think women foresee with certain prescience when they will be loved. She drew the lattice quickly to, and blew the lamp out: she kissed me in the darkness. Because her heart was glad or sorry? Both, perhaps.

Love makes one selfish. For the first time she left my lattice closed all through the oppressive hours until daybreak.

"Whenever a woman sees anything out of her window that makes her eager to look again, she always shuts the shutter. Why, I wonder?" said the balsam to me.

"That she may peep unsuspected through a chink," said the vine round the corner, who could overhear.

It was profane of the vine, and in regard to Lili untrue. She did not know very well, I dare say, why she withdrew herself on that sudden impulse, as the pimpernel shuts itself up at the touch of a raindrop.

But she did not stay to look through a crevice; she went straight to her little narrow bed, and told her beads and prayed, and slept till the

cock crew in a stable near and the summer day-break came.

She might have been in a chamber all mirror and velvet and azure and gold in any one of the ten thousand places of pleasure, and been leaning over gilded balconies under the lime leaves, tossing up little paper balloons in the air for gay wagers of love and wine and jewels. Pleasure had asked her more than once to come down from her attic and go with its crowds; for she was fair of feature and lithe of limb, though only a work-girl of Paris. And she would not, but slept here under the eaves, as the swallows did.

“We have not seen enough, little rose, you and I,” she would say to me with a smile and a sigh. “But it is better to be a little pale, and live a little in the dark, and be a little cramped in a garret window, than to live grand in the sun for a moment, and the next to be tossed away in a gutter. And one can be so happy anyhow — almost anyhow! — when one is young. If I could only see a very little piece more of the sky, and get every Sunday out to the dear woods, and live one floor lower, so that the winters were not quite so cold and the summers not quite so hot, and find a little more

time to go to mass in the cathedral, and be able to buy a pretty blue-and-white home of porcelain for you, I should ask nothing more of the blessed Mary—nothing more upon earth.”

She had had the same simple bead-roll of innocent wishes ever since the first hour that she had raised me from the dust of the street; and it would, I doubt not, have remained her only one all the years of her life, till she should have glided down into a serene and cheerful old age of poverty and labor under that very same roof, without the blessed Mary ever deigning to harken or answer. Would have done so if the painter René could have seen the stars, and so had not been driven to look instead at the glow-worm through my leaves.

But after that night on which she shut to the lattice so suddenly, I think the bead-roll lengthened—lengthened, though for some time the addition to it was written on her heart in a mystical language which she did not try to translate even to herself—I suppose fearing its meaning.

René made approaches to his neighbor's friendship soon after that night. He was but an art student, the son of a poor mountaineer, and with scarce a thing he could call his own

except an easel of deal, a few plaster casts, and a bed of straw. She was but a working-girl, born of Breton peasants, and owning as her sole treasures two silver ear-rings and a white rose.

But for all that, no courtship could have been more reverential on the one side or fuller of modest grace on the other if the scene of it had been a palace of princes or a *château* of the nobles.

He spoke very little.

The vine had said that at the club round the corner he was very eloquent, with all the impassioned and fierce eloquence common to men of the south. But with Lili he was almost mute. The vine, who knew human nature well — as vines always do, since their juices unlock the secret thoughts of men and bring to daylight their darkest passions — the vine said that such silence in one by nature eloquent showed the force of his love and its delicacy.

This may be so: I hardly know. My lover the wind, when he is amorous, is loud; but then it is true his loves are not often very constant.

René chiefly wooed her by gentle service. He brought her little lovely wild flowers, for which he ransacked the woods of St. Germain and Meudon. He carried the billets of her fire-

wood up the seven long, twisting, dirty flights of stairs. He fought for her with the wicked old porteress at the door downstairs. He played to her in the gray of the evening on a quaint, simple flute, a relic of his boyhood, the sad, wild, touching airs of his own southern mountains—played at his open window while the lamps burned through the dusk, till the people listened at their doors and casements and gathered in groups in the passage below, and said to one another, “How clever he is!—and he starves.”

He did starve very often, or at least he had to teach himself to keep down hunger with a morsel of black chaff-bread and a stray roll of tobacco. And yet I could see that he had become happy.

Lili never asked him within her door. All the words they exchanged were from their open lattices, with the space of the roadway between them.

I heard every syllable they spoke, and they were on the one side most innocent and on the other most reverential. Ay, though you may not believe it—you who know the people of Paris from the travesties of theatres and the slanders of salons.

And all this time secretly he worked on at her portrait. He worked out of my sight and hers, in the inner part of his garret, but the swallows saw and told me. There are never any secrets between birds and flowers.

We used to live in Paradise together, and we love one another as exiles do; and we hold in our cups the raindrops to slake the thirst of the birds, and the birds in return bring to us from many lands and over many waters tidings of those lost ones who have been torn from us to strike the roots of our race in far-off soils and under distant suns.

Late in the summer of the year, one wonderful fête-day, Lili did for once get out to the woods, the old kindly green woods of Vincennes.

A neighbor on a lower floor, a woman who made poor, scentless, senseless, miserable imitations of all my race in paper, sat with the old bedridden grandmother while Lili took her holiday—so rare in her life, though she was one of the motes in the bright champagne of the dancing air of Paris. I missed her sorely on each of those few sparse days of her absence, but for her I rejoiced.

"Je reste: tu t'en vas," says the rose to the

butterfly in the poem; and I said so in my thoughts to her.

She went to the broad level grass, to the golden fields of the sunshine, to the sound of the bees murmuring over the wild purple thyme, to the sight of the great snowy clouds slowly sailing over the sweet blue freedom of heaven—to all the things of my birthright and my deathless remembrance—all that no woman can love as a rose can love them.

But I was not jealous; nay, not though she had cramped me in a little earth-bound cell of clay. I envied wistfully indeed, as I envied the swallows their wings which cleft the air, asking no man's leave for their liberty. But I would not have maimed a swallow's pinion had I had the power, and I would not have abridged an hour of Lili's freedom. Flowers are like your poets: they give ungrudgingly, and, like all lavish givers, are seldom recompensed in kind.

We cast all our world of blossom, all our treasury of fragrance, at the feet of the one we love; and then, having spent ourselves in that too abundant sacrifice, you cry, "A yellow, faded thing!—to the dust-hole with it!" and root us up violently and fling us to rot with the refuse and offal; not remembering the days

when our burden of beauty made sunlight in your darkest places, and brought the odors of a lost paradise to breathe over your bed of fever.

Well, there is one consolation. Just so likewise do you deal with your human wonder-flower of genius.

Lili went for her day in the green midsummer world—she and a little blithe, happy-hearted group of young work-people—and I stayed in the garret window, hot and thirsty, and drooping and pale, choked by the dust that drifted up from the pavement, and hearing little all day long save the quarrels of the sparrows and the whir of the engine wheels in a baking-house close at hand.

For it was some great day or other, when all Paris was out *en fête*, and every one was away from his or her home, except such people as the old bedridden woman and the cripple who watched her. So, at least, the white roof-pigeons told me, who flew where they listed, and saw the whole splendid city beneath them—saw all its glistening of arms and its sheen of palace roofs, all its gilded domes and its white, wide squares, all its crowds, many-hued as a field of tulips, and its flashing eagles golden as the sun.

When I had been alone two hours, and whilst the old building was silent and empty, there came across the street from his own dwelling-place the artist René, with a parcel beneath his arm.

He came up the stairs with a light, noiseless step, and pushed open the door of our attic. He paused on the threshold a moment, with the sort of reverent, hushed look on his face that I had seen on the faces of one or two swarthy, bearded, scarred soldiers as they paused before the picinas at the door of the little chapel which stood in my sight on the other side of our street.

Then he entered, placed that which he carried on a wooden chair fronting the light, uncovered it, and went quietly out again, without the women in the inner closet hearing him.

What he had brought was the canvas I had seen grow under his hand, the painting of me and the lamp and Lili. I do not doubt how he had done it; it was surely the little attic window, homely and true in likeness, and yet he had glorified us all, and so framed in my leaves and my white flowers, the low oil flame and the fair head of my mistress, that there was that in the little picture which made me tremble and yet

be glad. On a slender slip of paper attached to it there was written, "*Il n'y a pas de nuit sans étoile.*"

Of him I saw no more. The picture kept me silent company all the day.

At evening Lili came. It was late. She brought with her a sweet, cool perfume of dewy mosses and fresh leaves and strawberry plants — sweet as honey. She came in with a dark, dreamy brilliance in her eyes and long coils of foliage in her hands.

She brought to the canary chickweed and a leaf of lettuce. She kissed me and laid wet mosses on my parching roots, and fanned me with the breath of her fresh lips. She took to the old women within a huge cabbage leaf full of cherries, having, I doubt not, gone herself without in order to bring the ruddy fruit to them.

She had been happy, but she was very quiet. To those who love the country as she and I did, and, thus loving it, have to dwell in cities, there is as much of pain, perhaps, as of pleasure in a fleeting glimpse of the lost heaven.

She was tired, and sat for a while, and did not see the painting, for it was dusk. She only saw it when she rose and turned to light

the lamp; then, with a little shrill cry, she fell on her knees before it in her wonder and her awe, and laughed and sobbed a little, and then was still again, looking at this likeness of herself.

The written words took her long to spell out, for she could scarcely read, but when she had



mastered them, her head sank on her breast with a flush and a smile, like the glow of the dawn over Provence, I thought.

She knew whence it came, no doubt, though

there were many artists and students of art in that street.

But then there was only one who had watched her night after night as men watched the stars of old to read their fates in the heavens.

Lili was only a young *ouvrière*, she was only a girl of the people: she had quick emotions and innocent impulses; she had led her life straightly because it was her nature, as it is of the lilies—her namesakes, my cousins—to grow straight to the light, pure and spotless. But she was of the populace; she was frank, fearless, and strong, despite all her dreams. She was glad, and she sought not to hide it. With a gracious impulse of gratitude she turned to the lattice and leaned past me, and looked for my neighbor.

He was there in the gloom; he strove not to be seen, but a stray ray from a lamp at the vintner's gleamed on his handsome dark face, lean and pallid and yearning and sad, but full of force and of soul like a head of Rembrandt's. Lili stretched her hands to him with a noble, candid gesture and a sweet, tremulous laugh: "What you have given me!—it is you?—it *is* you?"

"Mademoiselle forgives?" he murmured,

leaning as far out as the gable would permit. The street was still deserted, and very quiet. The theatres were all open to the people that night free, and bursts of music from many quarters rolled in through the sultry darkness.

Lili colored over all her fair, pale face, even as I have seen my sisters' white breasts glow to a wondrous, wavering warmth as the sun of the west kissed them. She drew her breath with a quick sigh. She did not answer him in words, but with a sudden movement of exquisite eloquence she broke from me my fairest and my last-born blossom and threw it from her lattice into his.

Then, as he caught it, she closed the lattice with a swift, trembling hand, and left the chamber dark, and fled to the little sleeping-closet where her crucifix and her mother's rosary hung together above her bed.

As for me, I was left bereaved and bleeding. The dew which waters the growth of your human love is usually the tears or blood of some martyred life.

I loved Lili.

I prayed, as my torn stem quivered and my fairest begotten sank to her death in the night

and the silence, that I might be the first and the last to suffer from the human love born that night.

I, a rose — Love's flower.





PART SECOND.

NOW, before that summer was gone, these two were betrothed to one another, and my little fair dead daughter, all faded and scentless though her half-opened leaves were, remained always on René's heart as a tender and treasured relic.

They were betrothed, I say — not wedded, for they were so terribly poor.

Many a day he, I think, had not so much as a crust to eat; and there passed many weeks when the works on his canvas stood unfinished because he had not wherewithal to buy the oils and the colors to finish them.

René was frightfully poor, indeed ; but then, being an artist and a poet, and the lover of a fair and noble woman, and a dreamer of dreams, and a man God-gifted, he was no longer wretched. For the life of a painter is beautiful when he is still young, and loves truly, and has a genius in him stronger than all calamity, and hears a voice in which he believes say always in his ear : " Fear nothing. Men must believe as I do in thee, one day. And meanwhile we can wait ! " And a painter in Paris, even though he starve on a few sous a day, can have so much that is lovely and full of picturesque charm in his daily pursuits : the long, wondrous galleries full of the arts he adores ; the "*réalité de l'idéal*" around him in that perfect world ; the slow, sweet, studious hours in the calm wherein all that is great in humanity alone survives ; the trance — half adoration, half aspiration, at once desire and despair — before the face of the Mona Lisa ; then, without, the streets so glad and so gay in the sweet, living sunshine ; the quiver of green leaves among gilded balconies ; the groups at every turn about the doors ; the glow of color in market-place and peopled square ; the quaint gray piles in old historic ways ; the stones, from

every one of which some voice from the imperishable Past cries out; the green, silent woods, the little leafy villages, the winding waters garden-girt; the forest heights, with the city gleaming and golden in the plain; —all these are his. With these — and youth — who shall dare say he is not rich — ay, though his board be empty and his cup be dry?

I had not loved Paris — I, a little imprisoned rose, caged in a clay pot, and seeing nothing but the sky-line of the roofs. But I grew to love it, hearing from René and from Lili of all the poetry and gladness that Paris made possible in their young and burdened lives, and which could have been thus possible in no other city of the earth.

City of Pleasure you have called her, and with truth; but why not also City of the Poor? for that city, like herself, has remembered the poor in her pleasure, and given to them, no less than to the richest, the treasure of her laughing sunlight, of her melodious music, of her gracious hues, of her million flowers, of her shady leaves, of her divine ideals.

O world! when you let Paris die you will let your last youth die with her! Your rich will mourn a paradise deserted, but your poor will

have need to weep with tears of blood for the ruin of the sole Eden whose sunlight sought them in their shadow, whose music found them in their loneliness, whose glad green ways were open to their tired feet, whose radiance smiled the sorrow from their aching eyes, and in whose wildest errors and whose vainest dreams their woes and needs were unforgotten.

Well, this little, humble love-idyl, which grew into being in an attic, had a tender grace of its own; and I watched it with tenderness, and it seemed to me fresh as the dews of the morning in the midst of the hot, stifling world.

They could not marry: he had nothing but famine for his wedding-gift, and all the little that she made was taken for the food and wine of the bedridden old grandam in that religious execution of a filial duty which is so habitual in the French family-life that no one dreams counting it as a virtue.

But they spent their leisure time together: they passed their rare holiday hours in each other's society in the woods which they both loved or in the public galleries of art; and when the autumn came on apace, and they could no longer sit at their open casements, he still watched the gleam of her pale lamp as a

pilgrim the light of a shrine, and she, ere she went to her rest, would push ajar the closed shutter and put her pretty fair head into the darkling night, and waft him a gentle good-night, and then go and kneel down by her bed and pray for him and his future before the cross which had been her dead mother's.

On that bright summer a hard winter followed. The poor suffered very much; and I in the closed lattice knew scarcely which was the worse—the icy, shivering chills of the snow-burdened air, or the close, noxious suffocation of the stove.

I was very sickly and ill, and cared little for my life during that bitter cold weather, when the panes of the lattice were all blocked from week's end to week's end with the solid, silvery foliage of the frost.

René and Lili both suffered greatly: he could only keep warmth in his veins by the stoves of the public libraries, and she lost her work in the box trade after the New Year fairs, and had to eke out as best she might the few francs she had been able to lay back in the old brown pipkin in the closet. She had, moreover, to sell most of the little things in her garret; her own mattress went, though she kept

the bed under her grandmother. But there were two things she would not sell, though for both was she offered money; they were her mother's reliques and myself.

She would not, I am sure, have sold the picture, either. But for that no one offered her a centime.

One day, as the last of the winter solstice was passing away, the old woman died.

Lili wept for her sincere and tender tears, though never in my time, nor in any other, I believe, had the poor old querulous, paralytic sufferer rewarded her with anything except lamentation and peevish discontent.

"*Now* you will come to me?" murmured her lover, when they had returned from laying the old dead peasant in the quarter of the poor.

Lili drooped her head softly upon his breast.

"If you wish it!" she whispered, with a whisper as soft as the first low breath of summer.

If he wished it!

A gleam of pale gold sunshine shone through the dulled panes upon my feeble branches; a little timid fly crept out and spread its wings; the bells of the church rang an angelus; a child laughed in the street below; there came a smile of greenness spreading over the boughs of leaf-

less trees; my lover, the wind, returned from the south, fresh from desert and ocean, with the scent of the spice groves and palm aisles of the East in his breath, and, softly unclosing my lattice, murmured to me: "Didst thou think I was faithless? See, I come with the spring!"

So, though I was captive and they two were poor, yet we three were all happy; for love and a new year of promise were with us.

I bore a little snowy blossom (sister to the one which slept lifeless on René's heart) that spring, whilst yet the swallows were not back from the African gardens, and the first violets were carried in millions through the streets—the only innocent imperialists that the world has ever seen.

That little winter-begotten darling of mine was to be Lili's nuptial-flower. She took it so tenderly from me that it hardly seemed like its death.

"My little dear rose, who blossoms for me, though I can only cage her in clay, and only let her see the sun's rays between the stacks of the chimneys!" she said softly over me as she kissed me; and when she said that, could I any more grieve for Provence?

"What do they wed upon, those two?" said the old vine to me.

And I answered him, "Hope and dreams."

"Will those bake bread and feed babes?" said the vine, as he shook his wrinkled tendrils despondently in the March air.

We did not ask in the attic.

Summer was nigh at hand, and we loved one another.

René had come to us—we had not gone to him. For our garret was on the sunny, his on the dark, side of the street, and Lili feared the gloom for me and the bird; and she could not bring herself to leave that old red-leaved creeper who had wound himself so close about the rainpipe and the roof, and who could not have been dislodged without being slain.

With the Mardi Gras her trade had returned to her. René, unable to prosecute his grand works, took many of the little boxes in his own hands, and wrought on them with all the nameless mystical charm and the exquisite grace of touch which belong to the man who is by nature a great artist. The little trade could not at its best price bring much, but it brought bread; and we were happy.

While he worked at the box lids she had leisure for her household labors; when these were done she would draw out her mother's old

Breton distaff, and would sit and spin. When twilight fell they would go forth together to dream under the dewy avenues and the glistening stars, or as often would wait within whilst he played on his mountain flute to the people at the doorways in the street below.

“Is it better to go out and see the stars and the leaves ourselves, or to stay indoors and make all these forget the misfortune of not seeing them?” said Lili on one of those evenings when the warmth and the sunset almost allured her to draw the flute from her husband’s hands and give him his hat instead; and then she looked down into the narrow road, at the opposite houses, at the sewing-girls stitching by their little windows, at the pale students studying their sickly lore with scalpel and with skeleton, at the hot, dusty little children at play on the asphalt sidewalk, at the sorrowful, darkened casements behind which she knew beds of sickness or of paralyzed old age were hidden — looked at all this from behind my blossoms, and then gave up the open air and the evening stroll that were so dear a pastime to her, and whispered to René, “Play, or they will be disappointed.”

And he played, instead of going to the debating-club in the room round the corner.

“He has ceased to be a patriot,” grumbled the old vine. “It is always so with every man when once he has loved a woman!”

Myself, I could not see that there was less patriotism in breathing the poetry of sound into the ears of his neighbors than in rousing the passions of hell in the breasts of his brethren.

But perhaps this was my ignorance: I believe that of late years people have grown to hold that the only pure patriotism is, and ought to be, evinced in the most intense and the most brutalized form of one passion,—“Envy, eldest-born of hell.”

So these two did some good, and were happy, though more than once it chanced to them to have to go a whole day without tasting food of any sort.

I have said that René had genius, — a genius bold, true, impassioned, masterful,—such a genius as colors the smallest trifles that it touches. René could no more help putting an ideal grace into those little sweetmeat boxes — which sold at their very highest, in the booths of the fairs, at fifty centimes apiece — than we, the roses, can help being fragrant and fair.

Genius has a way of casting its pearls in the

dust as we scatter our fragrance to every breeze that blows. Now and then the pearl is caught and treasured, as now and then some solitary creature pauses to smell the sweetness of the air in which we grow, and thanks the God who made us.

But as ninety-nine roses bloom unthanked for one that is thus remembered, so ninety-nine of the pearls of genius are trodden to pieces for one that is set on high and crowned with honor.

In the twilight of a dull day a little, feeble, brown old man climbed the staircase and entered our attic with shambling step.

We had no strangers to visit us: who visits the poor? We thought he was an enemy: the poor always do think so, being so little used to strangers.

René drew himself erect, and strove to hide the poverty of his garments, standing by his easel. Lili came to me and played with my leaves in her tender, caressing fashion.

"You painted this, M. René Claude?" asked the little brown old man. He held in his hand one of the bonbon boxes, the prettiest of them all, with a tambourine-girl dancing in a wreath of Provence roses. René had copied me with

loving fidelity in the flowers, and with a sigh had murmured as he cast the box aside when finished: "That ought to fetch at least a franc!" But he got no more than the usual two sous for it.

The little man sat down on the chair which Lili placed for him.

"So they told me where I bought this. It was at a booth at St. Cloud. Do you know that it is charming?"

René smiled a little sadly; Lili flushed with joy. It was the first praise which she had ever heard given to him.

"You have a great talent," pursued the little man.

René bowed his handsome, haggard face — his mouth quivered a very little: for the first time Hope entered into him.

"Genius, indeed," said the stranger; and he sauntered a little about and looked at the canvases, and wondered and praised, and said not very much, but said that little so well and so judiciously that it was easy to see he was no mean judge of art, and possibly no slender patron of it.

As Lili stood by me I saw her color come and go and her breast heave. I too trembled

in all my leaves: were recognition and the world's homage coming to René at last?

"And I have been so afraid always that I had injured, burdened him, clogged his strength in that endless strife!" she murmured below her breath. "O dear little rose! if only the world can but know his greatness!"

Meanwhile the old man looked through the sketches and studies with which the room was strewn. "You do not finish your things?" he said abruptly.

René flushed darkly. "Oil pictures cost money," he said briefly, "and—I am very poor."

Though a peasant's son, he was very proud: the utterance must have cost him much.

The stranger took snuff. "You are a man of singular genius," he said simply. "You only want to be known to get the prices of Meissonier."

Meissonier! — the Rothschild of the studios, the artist whose six-inch canvas would bring the gold value of a Raphael or a Titian!

Lili, breathing fast, and white as death with ecstasy, made the sign of the cross on her breast; the delicate brown hand of René shook where it leaned on his easel.

They were both silent—silent from the intensity of their hope.

“Do you know who I am?” the old man pursued with a cordial smile.

“I have not that honor,” murmured René.

The stranger, taking his snuff out of a gold box, named a name at which the painter started. It was that of one of the greatest art dealers in the whole of Europe,—one who at a word could make or mar an artist’s reputation,—one whose accuracy of judgment was considered infallible by all connoisseurs, and the passport to whose galleries was to any unknown painting a certain passport also to the fame of men.

“You are a man of singular genius,” repeated the great purchaser, taking his snuff in the middle of the little bare chamber. “It is curious—one always finds genius either in a cellar or in an attic: it never, by any chance, is to be discovered midway on the stairs—never in the *mezzo terso*! But to the point. You have great delicacy of touch, striking originality, a wonderful purity yet bloom in your color, and an exquisite finish of minutiae, without any weakness,—a combination rare, very rare. That girl yonder, feeding white pigeons on the leads of a roof, with an atom of blue sky, and a few

vine leaves straying over the parapet—that is perfectly conceived. Finished it must be. So must that little study of the beggar-boy looking through the gilded gates into the rose-gardens—it is charming, charming. Your price for those?”

René's colorless, worn young face colored to the brows. “Monsieur is too good,” he muttered brokenly. “A nameless artist has no price, except —”

“Honor,” murmured Lili as she moved forward with throbbing heart and dim eyes. “Ah, monsieur, give him a name in Paris! We want nothing else — nothing else!”

“Poor fools!” said the dealer to his snuff-box. I heard him — they did not.

“Madame,” he answered aloud, “Paris herself will give him that the first day his first canvas hangs in my galleries. Meanwhile, I must in honesty be permitted to add something more. For each of those little canvases, the girl on the roof and the boy at the gate, I will give you now two thousand francs, and two thousand more when they shall be completed. Provided —”

He paused and glanced musingly at René.

Lili had turned away, and was sobbing for very joy at this undreamed-of deliverance.

René stood quite still, with his hands crossed on the easel and his head bent on his chest. The room, I think, swam around him.

The old man sauntered again a little about the place, looking here and looking there, murmuring certain artistic disquisitions technical and scientific, leaving them time to recover from the intensity of their emotion.

What a noble thing old age was, I thought, living only to give hope to the young in their sorrow, and to release captive talents from the prison of obscurity! We should leave the little room in the roof, and dwell in some bright quarter where it was all leaves and flowers; and René would be great, and go to dine with princes and drive a team of belled horses, like a famous painter who had dashed once with his splendid equipage through our narrow passage; and we should see the sky always — as much of it as ever we chose; and Lili would have a garden of her own, all grass and foliage and falling waters, in which I should live in the open air all the day long, and make believe that I was in Provence.

My dreams and my fancies were broken by the sound of the old man's voice taking up the thread of his discourse once more in front of René.

"I will give you four thousand francs each for those two little canvases," he repeated. "It is a mere pinch of dust to what you will make in six months' time if—if—you hear me?—your name is brought before the public of Paris in my galleries and under my auspices. I suppose you have heard something of what I can do, eh? Well, all I can do I will do for you; for you have a great talent, and without introduction, my friend, you may as well roll up your pictures and burn them in your stove to save charcoal. You know that?"

René indeed knew—none better. Lili turned on the old man her sweet, frank Breton eyes, smiling their radiant gratitude through tenderest tears.

"The saints will reward you, monsieur, in a better world than this," she murmured softly.

The old man took snuff a little nervously. "There is one condition I must make," he said with a trifling hesitation—"one only."

"Ask of my gratitude what you will," answered René quickly, while he drew a deep breath of relief and freedom,—the breath of one who casts to the ground the weight of a deadly burden.

"It is, that you will bind yourself only to paint for me."

"Certainly!" René gave the assent with eagerness. Poor fellow! it was a novelty so exquisite to have any one save the rats to paint for. It had never dawned upon his thoughts that when he stretched his hands out with such passionate desire to touch the hem of the garment of Fortune and catch the gleam of the laurels of Fame, he might be in truth only holding them out to fresh fetters.

"Very well," said the old man quietly, and he sat down again and looked full in René's face, and unfolded his views for the artist's future.

He used many words, and was slow and suave in their utterance, and paused often and long to take out his heavy gold box; but he spoke well. Little by little his meaning gleamed out from the folds of verbiage in which he skilfully enwrapped it.

It was this.

The little valueless drawings on the people's sweetmeat boxes of gilded cardboard had a grace, a color, and a beauty in them which had caught, at a fair-booth in the village of St. Cloud, the ever-watchful eyes of the great

dealer. He had bought half a dozen of the boxes for a couple of francs. He had said, "Here is what I want." Wanted for what? Briefly, to produce Petitot enamels and Fragonard cabinets — genuine eighteenth-century work. There was a rage for it. René would understand?

René's dark southern eyes lost a little of their new lustre of happiness, and grew troubled with a sort of cloud of perplexity. He did not seem to understand.

The old man took more snuff, and used phrases clearer still.

There were great collectors—dilettanti of houses imperial and royal and princely and noble, of all the grades of greatness—who would give any sum for *bonbonnières* and *tabatières* of eighteenth-century work by any one of the few famous masters of that time. A genuine, incontestable sweetmeat box from the *ateliers* of the Louis XIV. or Louis XV. period would fetch almost a fabulous sum. Then again he paused, doubtfully.

René bowed, and his wondering glance said without words, "I know this. But I have no eighteenth-century work to sell you: if I had, should we starve in an attic?"

His patron coughed a little, looked at Lili, then proceeded to explain yet further.

In René's talent he had discerned the hues, the grace, the delicacy yet brilliancy, the voluptuousness and the *désinvolteure* of the best eighteenth-century work. René doubtless did other and higher things which pleased himself far more than these airy trifles. Well, let him pursue the greater line of art if he chose; but he, the old man who spoke, could assure him that nothing would be so lucrative to him as those bacchantes in wreaths of roses and young tambourine-players *gorge au vent* dancing in a bed of violets, and beautiful marquises, powdered and jewelled, looking over their fans, which he had painted for those poor little two-sous boxes of the populace, and the like of which, exquisitely finished on enamel or ivory, set in gold and tortoise-shell rimmed with pearls and turquoises or opals and diamonds, would deceive the finest connoisseur in Europe into receiving them as — whatever they might be signed and dated.

If René would do one or two of these at dictation in a year, not more, — more would be perilous, — paint and sign them and produce them with any touches that might be com-

manded; never ask what became of them when finished, nor recognize them if hereafter he might see them in any illustrious collection — if René would bind himself to do this, he, the old man who spoke, would buy his other paintings, place them well in his famous galleries, and, using all his influence, would make him in a twelvemonth's time the most celebrated of all the young painters of Paris.

It was a bargain? Ah, how well it was, he said, to put the best of one's powers into the most trifling things one did! If that poor little two-sous box had been less lavishly and gracefully decorated, it would never have arrested his eyes in the bonbon-booth at St. Cloud. The old man paused to take snuff and receive an answer.

René stood motionless.

Lili had sunk into a seat, and was gazing at the tempter with wide-open, puzzled, startled eyes. Both were silent.

“It is a bargain?” said the old man again. “Understand me, M. René Claude. You have no risk, absolutely none, and you have the certainty of fair fame and fine fortune in the space of a few years. You will be a great man before you have a gray hair: that comes to very few.

I shall not trouble you for more than two *dix-huitième siècle* enamels in the year — perhaps for only one. You can spend ten months out of the twelve on your own canvases, making your own name and your own wealth as swiftly as your ambition and impatience can desire. Madame here," said the acute dealer with a pleasant smile — "Madame here can have a garden sloping on the Seine and a glass house of choicest flowers — which I see are her graceful weakness — ere another rose-season has time to come round, if you choose."

His voice lingered softly on the three last words.

The dew stood on René's forehead, his hands clenched on the easel.

"You wish me — to — paint — forgeries of the Petitot enamels?"

The old man smiled unmoved: "Chut, chut! Will you paint me little *bonbonnières* on enamel instead of on cardboard? That is all the question. I have said where they go, how they are set: what they are called shall be my affair. You know nothing. The only works of yours which you will be concerned to acknowledge will be your own canvas pictures. What harm can it do any creature? You will gratify

a connoisseur or two innocently, and you will meanwhile be at leisure to follow the bent of your own genius, which otherwise —”

He paused: I heard the loud throbs of René's heart under that cruel temptation.

Lili gazed at his tempter with the same startled terror and bewilderment still dilating her candid eyes with a woful pain.

“Otherwise,” pursued the old man with merciless tranquillity, “you will never see me any more, my friends. If you try to repeat any story to my hindrance, no one will credit you. I am rich, you are poor. You have a great talent: I shall regret to see it lost, but I shall let it die — so.”

And he trod very gently on a little gnat that crawled near his foot, and killed it.

A terrible agony gathered in the artist's face.

“O God!” he cried in his torture, and his eyes went to the canvases against the wall, and then to the face of his wife, with an unutterable, yearning desire.

For them, for *them*, this sin which tempted him looked virtue.

“Do you hesitate?” said the merciless old man. “Pshaw! whom do you hurt? You give me work as good as that which you imitate,

and I call it only by a dead man's name: who is injured? What harm can there be in humoring the fanaticism of fashion? Choose—I am in haste.”

René hid his face with his hands, so that he should not behold those dear creations of his genius which so cruelly, so innocently, assailed him with a temptation beyond his strength.

“Choose for me—you!” he muttered in his agony to Lili.

Lili, white as death, drew closer to him.

“My René, your heart has chosen,” she murmured through her dry, quivering lips. “You cannot buy honor by fraud.”

René lifted his head and looked straight in the eyes of the man who held the scales of his fate, and could weigh out for his whole life's portion either fame and fortune, or obscurity and famine.

“Sir,” he said slowly, with a bitter, tranquil smile about his mouth, “my garret is empty, but it is clean. May I trouble you to leave it as you found it?”

So they were strong to the end, these two famished children of frivolous Paris.

But when the door had closed and shut their tempter out, the revulsion came: they wept

those tears of blood which come from the hearts' depths of those who have seen Hope mock them with a smile a moment, to leave them face to face with Death.

"Poor fools!" sighed the old vine from his corner in the gray, dull twilight of the late autumn day.

Was the vine right?

The air which he had breathed for fifty years through all his dust-choked leaves and tendrils had been the air off millions of human lungs, corrupted in its passage through millions of human lips; and the thoughts which he thought were those of human wisdom.

The sad day died; the night fell; the lattice was closed; the flute lay untouched. A great misery seemed to enfold us. True, we were no worse off than we had been when the same day dawned. But that is the especial cruelty of every tempter always: he touches the innocent, closed eyes of his victims with a collyrium which makes the happy blindness of content no longer possible. If strong to resist him, he has still his vengeance, for they are never again at peace as they were before that fatal hour in which he showed them all that they were not, all that they might be.

Our stove was not more chill, our garret not more empty; our darkness not more dark amidst the gay, glad, dazzling city; our dusky roof and looming crown that shut the sky out from us not more gloomy and impenetrable than they had been on all those other earlier nights when yet we had been happy. Yet how intensified million-fold seemed cold and loneliness and poverty and darkness, all! — for we had for the first time known what it was to think of riches, of fame, of homage, of light, as *possible*, and then to lose them all forever!

I had been resigned for love's sake to dwell amongst the roofs, seeing not the faces of the stars, nor feeling ever the full glory of the sun; but now — I had dreamed of the fair freedom of garden-ways and the endless light of summer suns on palace terraces, and I drooped and shivered and sickened, and was twice captive and twice exiled, and knew that I was a little nameless, worthless, hapless thing, whose fairest chaplet of blossom no hand would ever gather for a crown.

As with my life, so was it likewise with theirs.

They had been so poor, but they had been so happy: the poverty remained, the joy had flown.

The winter was again very hard, very cold: they suffered greatly.

They could scarcely keep together body and soul, as your strange phrase runs; they went without food sometimes for days and days, and fuel they had scarcely ever.

The bird in his cage was sold; they would not keep the little golden singing thing to starve to silence like themselves.

As for me, I nearly perished of the cold; only the love I bore to Lili kept a little life in my leafless branches.

All that cruel winter-time they were strong still, those children of Paris.

For they sought no alms, and in their uttermost extremity neither of them ever whispered to the other: "Go seek the tempter; repent, be wise. Give not up our lives for a mere phantasy of honor."

"When the snow is on the ground, and the canvases have to burn in the stove, then you will change your minds and come to me on your knees," the old wicked, foul spirit had said mocking them, as he had opened the door of the attic and passed away creaking down the dark stairs.

And I suppose he had reckoned on this; but

if he had done so, he had reckoned without his host, as your phrase runs : neither René nor Lili ever went to him, either on knees or in any other wise.

When the spring came we three were still all living — at least their hearts still beat and their lips still drew breath, as my boughs were still green and my roots still clung to the soil. But no more to them or to me did the coming of spring bring, as of old, the real living of life, which is joy. And my lover the wind wooed me no more, and the birds no more brought me the rose-whispers of my kindred in Provence. For even the little pigeon-hole in the roof had become too costly a home for us, and we dwelt in a den under the stones of the streets, where no light came and scarce a breath of air ever strayed to us.

There the uncompleted canvases, on which the painter whom Lili loved had tried to write his title to the immortality of fame, were at last finished — finished, for the rats ate them.

All this while we lived — the man whose genius and misery were hell on earth ; the woman whose very purity and perfectness of love were her direst torture ; and I, the little white flower born of the sun and the dew, of

fragrance and freedom, to whom every moment of this blindness, this suffocation, this starvation, this stench of putrid odors, this horrible roar of the street above, was a moment worse than any pang of death.

Away there in Provence so many a fair rose-sister of mine bowed her glad, proud, innocent head with anguish and shuddering terrors to the sharp summons of the severing knife that cut in twain her life, whilst I — I, on and on — was forced to keep so much of life as lies in the capacity to suffer and to love in vain.

So much was left to them : no more.

“Let us compel Death to remember us, since even Death forgets us !” René murmured once in his despair to her.

But Lili had pressed her famished lips to his : “Nay, dear, wait ; God will remember us even yet, I think.”

It was her faith. And of her faith she was justified at last.

There came a ghastlier season yet, a time of horror insupportable — of ceaseless sound beside which the roar of the mere traffic of the streets would have seemed silence — a stench beside which the sulphur smoke and the gas fumes of a previous time would have been as

some sweet, fresh woodland air—a famine beside which the daily hunger of the poor was remembered as the abundance of a feast—a cold beside which the chillness of the scant fuel and empty braziers of other winters were recalled as the warmth of summer—a darkness only lit by the red flame of burning houses—a solitude only broken by the companionship of woe and sickness and despair—a suffocation only changed by a rush of air strong with the scent of blood, of putridity, of the million living plague-stricken, of the million dead lying unburied.

For there was war.

Of year or day or hour I knew nothing. It was always the same blackness as of night; the same horror of sound, of scent, of cold; the same misery; the same torture. I suppose that the sun was quenched, that the birds were dumb, that the winds were stilled forever—that all the world was dead; I do not know. They called it War. I suppose that they meant—Hell!

Yet Lili lived, and I; in that dead darkness we had lost René—we saw his face no more. Yet he could not be in his grave, I knew, for Lili, clasping my barren branches to her breast,

would murmur: "Whilst he still lives I will live — yes, yes, yes!"

And she did live — so long, so long! — on a few draughts of water and a few husks of grain.

I knew that it was long, for full a hundred times she muttered aloud: "Another day? O God! — how long? how long?"

At last in the darkness a human hand was stretched to her, once, close beside me. A foul, fierce light, the light of flame, was somewhere on the air about us, and that moment glowed through the horrid gloom we dwelt in in the bowels of the earth. I saw the hand and what it held to her; it was a stranger's, and it held the little colorless dead rose, my sweetest blossom, that had lain ever upon René's heart.

She took it — she who had given it as her first love-gift. She was mute. In the glare of the flame that quivered through the darkness I saw her — standing quite erect and very still.

The voice of a stranger thrilled through the din from the world above.

"He fought as only patriots can," it said softly and as through tears. "I was beside him. He fell with Regnault in the sortie yesterday. He could not speak; he had only

strength to give me this for you. Be comforted ; he has died for Paris."

On Lili's face there came once more the radiance of a perfect peace, a glory pure and endless as the glory of the sun. "Great in death!" she murmured. "My love, my love, I come!"

I lost her in the darkness.

I heard a voice above me say that life had left her lips as the dead rose touched them.

What more is there for me to tell?

I live, since to breathe, and to feel pain, and to desire vainly, and to suffer always, are surest proofs of life.

I live, since that stranger's hand, which brought my little dead blossom as the message of farewell, had pity on me and brought me away from that living grave. But the pity was vain; I died the only death that had any power to hurt me when the human heart I loved grew still forever.

The light of the full day now shines on me; the shadows are cool, the dews are welcome; they speak around me of the coming of spring, and in the silence of the dawns I hear from the woods without the piping of the nesting birds; but for me the summer can never more return

— for me the sun can never again be shining —
for me the greenest garden world is barren as a
desert.

For I am only a little rose, but I am in exile
and France is desolate.



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